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PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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FAITHFULNESS TO CONVICTION, THE BASIS OF RIGHT ACTION.

"Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."—Rom. xiv. 5.

The Jews were brought up not without ideas of spiritual religion; but their thought of spiritual religion was so harnessed to ceremonial observances, to ritual systems, to a thousand external acts, to processions, and feasts, and sacrifices, and washings, which had come, in their thought, to signify religious quality, that when Christ taught a pure spiritual religion, and they began to emancipate themselves, there would arise, of necessity, a thousand ethical difficulties.

We experience, in a slight degree, but only in a slight degree, something of the same troubles which they had, in our attempt to maintain ordinances, and yet, to be set free from ordinances. We believe that baptism is a useful ceremony or service; but we teach that it is not an indispensable one. We believe that the seventh day, as a day of rest, is a bounty and a blessing; but we hold that no man has authority to command it, and that we are free upon that day. We hold to religious observances—to meetings, and various institutions; but we also hold that they are our servants—that none of them are our masters.

Now, if you multiply a thousandfold the few and simple services which we have, you can conceive what the condition of the Jew was, who at every step had some religious duty to observe which had been rendered superstitiously sacred in his sight; and who, when he attempted to break away from his old beliefs, customs and usages, was in danger of violating his conscience.

The 14th of Romans deals largely with this subject, in one or other of its phases:

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye; but not to doubtful disputations [not to disputations that breed doubt]. For one believeth that he

SUNDAY EVENING, November 3, 1872. LESSON: Eccl. xi. 9, 10; xii. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 1319, 898, 1353.

may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth; for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

That is to say, let all these questions which you are called upon to settle, not be hastily, heedlessly settled. Do not take any liberty which seems to you to be wrong. Forbear what others practice, if you cannot see your way clear to follow their example. To him that thinketh it to be sin, it is sin. That is, it has the same effect upon his conscience that an actual sin would have.

"Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Make up your mind; let it be a deliberate, rational, moral conviction under which you act; and then boldly and earnestly follow the course that is marked out for you.

Now, *being fully persuaded in one's own mind* is a matter which has assumed various proverbial forms; and there is one of them that I want to talk about to-night—for there is a phrase that is its equivalent, namely: "Let every man be true to himself." Paul said, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind;" others have said, "Follow your convictions;" but the common expression in our time is, "Let every man be true to himself."

There are circumstances under which such a declaration as this, which has become very current, so that you hear it everywhere now, has a peculiar meaning. To one who is stepping out into the affairs of life, it is said, "Now be true to your own self." A young artist is reminded that it is a great thing to be true to one's self. As a lawyer or doctor enters upon the practice of his profession, men gather about him, to give him encouragement and advice, and some kind old man, intelligent and thoughtful, says, "I have but one thing to say to you: in your conflict with the world, be true to yourself." But of course being true to one's self depends upon what the person is. It may be good or bad, wise or foolish.

How did such a phrase as this come to be used in any beneficial way?

There have been times in which communities had sunk down into sloth—into a sort of dead contentment. There have been times when enterprise was, comparatively speaking, unknown; when men had read little and thought less; when religion, for the most part, was a repetition of things over and over again, almost in the same words and phrases; when philosophy was not found to enter into men's ways and customs; when their tastes were low;

when they conformed to public usages; when their range of life was very narrow, and they moved around in it mechanically; when no person was bold enough to be original, and nobody needed originality, and everybody was baptized into his beliefs and opinions, and everything went on in a servile and ignoble routine.

Now, under such circumstances, it is a good and wholesome thing for a man to come in, and break up the fallow-ground, and stir men up, and make them grow, and inspire them with curiosity, and ripen that curiosity into investigation, and make them long for other views of truth, for nobler patterns and ideals of life, and rouse the dry bones that may be lying in the valley of vision.

Where this takes place, men are exhorted not to be servile followers of precedent; not forever to yield allegiance to custom; not always to do just what everybody else has done; but to think, to be competent to think, to wake up their manhood, to develop what is in them, to grow everywhere and in every direction. When there is resurrection from sloth, from stupidity, and from a base conformity to and a daily continuity in a vulgar life, then there is a great deal of nobility in the maxim, "Be true to yourself." Do not follow the community. Do not mix up with everybody, so that there is no difference between you and others. God never made all men alike. He never meant them all to be alike. He made them competent to differ; and the glory of life is not in conformities, but in differences and peculiarities of character. There is reason for differences in the various departments of life. There is reason in art: do not be Byzantine; do not let every picture that you make be a copy of some other. There is reason in literature: do not write the same things that have been written; do not reflect the thoughts of others; do not let your ideas be stereotyped; do not take in truths of theology, or other truths, in a dogmatic or fixed form. That would imply that the truth was in its coffin, and not in its natural state, which is always a state of differentiation, and advance, and growth.

Out of this comes separateness. Men wake up and begin to live. It passes to the second state, which is one of danger—namely, the making of men obstinate. We need, therefore, to guard them against the dangers arising from being true to themselves under given circumstances. It is necessary that one should have a self. It is necessary that one should have individuality. It is necessary that one should have his own personality so marked that he can be told from another man, everywhere and in everything. Life loves variety; God loves variety; and men do, when they are alive. When they are in a genuine condition, they should have an individual char-

acter; and it should be real. It should spring from their fundamental qualities, and from the education that these qualities have received, in the providence of God.

But then, to be true to yourself, you must have an understanding that there is a devilish self and a divine self in every man; and you must have a distinct understanding as to which of these two selves you are going to be true to—as to which of them shall receive your obedience and your conscientious observance.

Men are born with animal natures. There is no difference between modern and ancient philosophers in their opinion on this point, that we inherit animal natures. It is a settled thing among all observers, that the same basilar instincts which exist in animals inhere also in men. There is the same fierce, destructive nature in men that there is in the lion and tiger. There is the same combative nature in man that there is in the wolf and the dog in their wild state. There is the same cunning, artful nature in men that there is in the fox. All the qualities in the animal kingdom by which they defend themselves, and make their way in life, we see reproduced in men.

Now this lower, this basilar, this animal self, no man can afford to be true to in any such sense as to follow it, pamper it, and make it supreme. Shall you say to a man who lives for eating and drinking, and who is a great glutton, "Be true to yourself"? It is his curse that he is too true to himself—to his gluttonous self. Shall you say to the old curmudgeon, the miser, "Be true to yourself?" He has been, for years and years, clawing and drawing in, and living as though he thought God's universe was a raking ground, and that he was in the center of it. Pelf has been his misery and his curse; and shall you exhort him to be true to himself? No, verily. Fidelity to his miserly self has been his damnation. Shall I say to a man who is selfish and sordid, "Be true to yourself"? I shall say to him, "Deny yourself. Take up the cross. Crush that which has been your central self in times gone by." Shall I say to a man who uses his force in an arbitrary, lordly, unfeeling way, so as to injure and oppress others, "Be true to yourself"? I shall say to him, "It is being true to yourself that has been your own destruction and others' misery."

Let men look and see what that self is which they are serving, when they say, "I am going to be true to myself." One man is true to himself: he is a peacock. Another man is true to himself: he is a monkey. Another man is true to himself: he is a lion, or a tiger, or a bear.

If you go on with this maxim, and use it indiscriminately, and

apply it to the strongest parts of a man's character, there is nothing that you cannot justify, from the top to the bottom of society. How much obstinacy and mischief have been wrought among men by the indiscreet use of this phrase!

I say, in regard to your whole lower self, "Deny, tie up, bind, drill, discipline, educate, harness, restrain that self."

But then, there is a divine self. There is a point in the economy of the human mind in which we are living no longer by our sensuous faculties; in which we are living no longer by the eye or the ear. Thought takes the place of observation, of sense, of sensation; and we have affections and ideas, which ripen into clusters of endless variety; and the imagination begins to irradiate our inward life; and we begin to feel in directions that the animal knows nothing of; and moral sentiments spring up in us; and we enlarge ourselves; and we use our powers; and things related to their use—rights, benefits, bounties, magnanimities, generosities—come in, to guide our thought and imagination. Our horizon widens. We take into view the invisible world, however far away it may seem. God comes into our consideration. We believe in the spirits of just men made perfect. Our mind takes in a nobler sphere, a larger range. And although we are still connected with the body, and all the necessities which attach to it by reason of this lower sphere, yet it becomes subject to our higher self.

Now, in regard to this higher self, out of which spring all fidelity, all conceptions of heroism, all purity, all truth, all faith, all love, I say, *Be true to it.*

Look at it a little in detail. No child comes out of his father's house who should not be exhorted, "Be true to yourself, as a man of honor." Although honor varies with the sentiment of different nations, and sometimes traverses itself, yet there is an element in the matter of honor which is of immense value. There is a sense of that which is just and right, and of good report; and *honor* is the consideration of these things from a higher standpoint than a merely commercial one. It is not a simple feeling that they are right abstractly, nor is it a moral sense alone; honor has something of imagination in it. It also has in it something of heroism. It is a lower form of conscience, dressed out in heroic elements. A man, a gentleman, without honor, is imperfect. Honor should ripen into religion, if that does not already exist; and when religion comes into the soul, it should develop honor. I see many persons who are conscientious, but who I do not think are honorable. A man may be conscientious and not honorable. A man may have a narrow, ignorant, misleading conscience, and may mean to do what is right,

and yet may pass among men for a dishonorable man. It is often the case that a man treats his fellow-men unkindly, pinchingly, meanly, under a general sense that it is right to do so—and that is what I call a *misleading conscience.*

On the other hand, there are a great many men who are loose in their ethical opinions, but who have a certain sensibility to right and wrong, though it is in a narrow sphere; though it has respect mainly to this life, and has little regard to the life which is to come; though it relates chiefly to men that are about one, and gives little consideration to those that are remote. Nevertheless, the spirit of honor, even under such circumstances, is one of the things without which society would be bankrupt.

No man, therefore, ought to go into society without having the principle of honor in him. I love to see a man who is sensitive to it. I love to hear a man, where there is occasion for it, say, "Do you doubt my honor, sir?" It is not necessary that one should be irritable and quarrelsome in the matter of honor; but I like to see a man hold fast to this quality. It is not best that he should talk much about it, or boast of it, but he ought to have it, and it should be fashioned on the highest forms of those elements which go to constitute a true Christian gentleman. It should be characterized by truth and fidelity. It should be combined with modesty, disinterestedness, self-sacrifice, and bounty toward others.

Sir Philip Sidney was considered a perfect gentleman; but not, I take it, on such a pattern as the thirteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians prescribes. Oh that I could make a bath of that chapter, and roll men in it till the color struck through and through! What perfect gentlemen I would make of them! Love is there regarded as the peculiar element of Christian manhood, and what a description is given of it!

"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

Read the thirteenth of 1st Corinthians; be that, and you will be a perfect Christian gentleman. The highest type of gentleman is a Christian gentleman. A man, to be a perfect gentleman, in the highest sense of that term, must feel the inspiration of the heart of God!

Parents should bring up their children to fear God, we are told. That injunction is a good one, if you mean reverential fear alone; but it is a bad one, if you mean servile fear. There is nothing that we fear more than the frown of one that we love. As a child fears

a kind and loving mother, so we are to fear God. We are to bring our children up to all that is sacred and admirable; but we are to bring them up to a sense of honor.

Among men this is a thing of education. It is a work for the table and for the nursery. It is a process which we are to carry along with religious instruction. I do not think we educate too much in religion, but I think that we sometimes suppose a narrow idea of religion to be sufficient, without instruction in the sense of honor; while the fact is that a knowledge of what constitutes true honor is very important.

I say to a young man, when he leaves his father's house and goes out into the world, "Now, be true to yourself—your better self. Do not let it become tarnished. Do not adopt that base and servile maxim, 'When you are among Romans do as Romans do.' You might as well say to a man, 'Among foxes do as foxes do; among wolves do as wolves do; among lions do as lions do.'" No; be a *man* always, everywhere, under all circumstances; and never forget that the more sensitive your honor, the higher its pitch, and the nobler its aspiration, the better it is for you. And if others are unlike you, do not take to hating them. Let your light so shine that men shall see in your religion the type of highercharacter. Be true to yourself, when *yourself* means *honor*.

Cultivate conscience, also, which is something more comprehensive than honor, and which is that soil out of which honor grows as naturally as a plant grows out of the ground. Be true to yourself as a man of honor and of conscience, in your judgments, your purposes and your conduct. As against self-conceit, be true to your sense of that which is best and ripest.

Do you tell me that life is so involved that you cannot get along and be an honest man? I say that you cannot afford to get along then. You must find a way, or make a way, to do right. Do you tell me that business is reduced to so fine a point of competition that men who are to live must be dishonest? I reply to you as Talleyrand replied to a man who said to him, "Why, you know I must live"—*I do not see that*. There is no special reason why you should live. It may be that in matters of business you are not strong enough. This is a thing which depends upon the type of the man.

Do you say, "I must have money"? Ah! that ends it for you. "They that will be rich," says the apostle, "fall into temptation and a snare." That is so. He also says, "The love of money is the root of all evil." That is so, too. It is not *money* that is the root of all evil, but the *love* of it. It is hungering, hankering after

riches; it is making haste to acquire wealth in the best way, of course, if you can: if you cannot, in the next best way, or in some damnable way—it is this that constitutes the evil. But it is not necessary that you should be rich. You can live without riches. You can get along with a little. It is not necessary that you should build a gorgeous palace, and furnish it magnificently. If, however, you make up your mind that you must have certain things; if you regard those things as indispensable to your happiness; if you say, "I am not going to move among common folks;" if you say, "I am going to stand up there, by fair means if I can, if not, by any means by which I can climb," then to you "money is the root of all evil," indeed.

Now, let every young man who is called into life be true to himself, as a conscience-bearer. If you cannot maintain your integrity and succeed, less success with a clear conscience will bring you more happiness. And let me tell you, success surely comes with conscience in the long run, other things being equal. Capacity and fidelity are commercially profitable qualities. They may demand a long time to achieve profit, but at length they are profitable.

Be true to yourself, also, as a conscience-bearer, against ridicule. This I address more especially to the young, though I think elderly people are as sensitive to ridicule, in their way, as people that are young. Many a man, from fear of having the finger of ridicule pointed at him, goes aside from what he understands to be the truest and best things. Do not comply with usages, because you are afraid to be singular. Singularity is the right of every honest man, and if to speak what you think makes you singular, blessed be God for your singularity. Always be true to your convictions on any subject, no matter how much those convictions may differ from the convictions of others. If you think it is wrong to play cards, do not play cards. If you think it is perfectly right to play cards, do not be afraid to play cards. If you believe it to be a sin to dance, do not let any man persuade you to dance. If you believe there is no possible harm in dancing, do not be afraid to dance. Act according to your highest judgment. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Do not comply with others' opinions unless they commend themselves to your judgment. Do that which you think is right, whatever others may say or think. Refuse to do that which you believe to be wrong, let the consequences be what they may. Follow your convictions in all your actions. It is not half so dangerous doing this, that, or the other thing which you think is right, though you stand alone in your opinion, as compliance or

non-compliance with the views of society contrary to your own moral sentiments. Sacrificing yourself is the mischief and peril.

Be true to yourself against sympathetic bias through your best affections. We hear such excuses as these from persons who have done what they knew was wrong: "I could not say 'No,' and disoblige one who has been so kind to me;" "I could not say 'No' to one that I loved;" "after having received such favors, I could not bear to put the company to blush and shame, as if I were their monitor and superior." I do not know that the Lord ever gave you any encouragement to suppose you could follow him without some cross-bearing. I do not believe any one ever became a full man without some cross-bearing. No man ever becomes a good thinker or actor in any department without cross-bearing. Be true to your conscience, whatever it may require of you.

Be true to your conscience against all those society compliances which may be easy and pleasant, but which in the end lower the tone of your manhood and self-respect, and take away from your moral discrimination its clarity, and its power over your life. Do right, however much it may cost you. Let your conduct always agree with your own convictions of right.

Be true to yourself, likewise, as a *man*—as a *Christian* man—as a man according to the pattern of Christ Jesus. No matter where that pattern came from; no matter from what source your knowledge of it was derived, follow it. Let it be your perpetual guide. Let it direct you in your outlooking and forelooking. We are in the image of God, and are the children of God, who have been touched by the Holy Ghost. Our life lies through matter, above matter, and beyond matter; in time, through time, and beyond time. We are children of immortality. Around us angels wait. The divine ministrations of providence work both outwardly and inwardly for us. God rules in our behalf. Heaven stands beckoning to us with sweet and bounteous invitation. Be true to that manhood which has immortality beyond it. Be true to that manhood which has for its father, God; for its friend, Christ; for its light, the Holy Ghost.

I beseech of you, in attempting to be true to yourself, beware of conceit; beware of narrow-mindedness; beware of indecent haste; beware of that laziness which refuses to read or think; beware of that intellectual presumption which leads you to suppose you can undo the thinkings of generations of mankind, or safely depart without consideration from the results which have been arrived at by the experiments of ages. It is hard to inaugurate a new truth, or to wean the world of those things which it has learned through

floods of tears in centuries of experience. So, be true to yourself, not in any vandal spirit, but with humility and meekness; with teachableness; with yearnings for a higher and better life.

I exhort you to be true to yourself. Look up and behold the exemplar, Jesus Christ. Pattern upon him, and thus aim at a better self than you can have here. Measure your life upon his life. Measure your soul upon his soul. Measure your disposition upon his disposition. Live so as, according to the strength of your nature in comparison with his, to reproduce the life of Christ in you. Live as Christ lived. Live for Christ. Then divine manhood will almost be yours on earth, and will ripen into divinity in the life that is to come.

To the bountiful and blessed providence that issues from the Heart of Love, I commit you. Young men and maidens, those in mid-life, and those who are approaching old age, look, I beseech you, one and all, away from your lower selves, up to your spiritual and divine selves. Nay, look away from yourselves entirely, to God. Fear him, and keep his commandments. That is all.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We rejoice, our Father, that we are not left to our own wisdom or knowledge. The spark would go out, and the flame would cease, but for the ministration of thy Spirit. Thou that sustainest the universe, and dost wield the orbs thereof; thou that dost turn this earth as a little thing, and dost clothe it through the seasons with thy bounty; thou that dost minister, each moment, to every living thing, and that art the source of life, the source of thought, the source of all that is noble and good in man,—we rejoice in thy paternal care and kindness, which is assured to us, and which has been made manifest in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and in his witness to us of the Holy Ghost, and, by the whole experience of our life, tested and made sure. We rejoice in the long line of those who have trusted thee, and not come to shame. We look back and see how many there have been of whom the world was not worthy, suffering in every form; cast out and rejected, persecuted, seemingly forsaken and cast to the ground, yet remembered by thee, upheld and made victorious, yea, crowned with death, which is better victory than life, and brought home to the heavenly land, to be with thee, and to rejoice with thee. There mingle the blessed of every age. There the things which earth was too cold to grow, thrive in a better clime. Buds that know not how to blossom here, are in full bloom there. That which was green and unlovely with us is ripe and beautiful with thee. That which was fragile and poor in this world, is, on that shore where no storm beats, growing strong and enduring as God. We rejoice in thinking that we are all, though with silent steps, and along the invisible way, quite unknown to ourselves, moving toward the blessed land. Though winter may betide us here, summer is waiting for us there. Though there may be mischances here, there are none there. Though blows and trouble may accompany our earthly experience, we rejoice in sufferings and tribulations, knowing that they work patience, and gentleness, and aspiration, and trust in God, and hopefulness, and courage. We rejoice that none can pluck us out of thine hand. Thou Lover! thou "that hast known our infirmities and our sins; thou that hast watched over us from the cradle and from our father's house,—thou art still our Lover and our Friend; in thee we are strong, and by thy grace omnipotent.

We rejoice in thee. We put all our trust and hope in thee. What time come fierce temptations; what time come doubts and fears; what time the very ground of trust and confidence seems crumbling and passing from under our feet; yea, when Satan vehemently tempts us, and says, Where is now thy God?—even then, through temptations infernal, through doubts and fears and skepticisms, we rise up and say, Thou art our God, and our souls' peculiar shelter; we rest in thee; and thou shalt accomplish thine own purposes; thou shalt fulfill thine own blessed will. And they who trust thee shall be mightier than princes. Thou shalt cause them to ride upon the high places of the earth.

We beseech of thee that the poor and needy may look unto thee; that those who are discouraged and distressed may feel that they have a God; that those who seem open to the incursion of every misfortune may feel that God is near them, to shield them. May those who run easily to mischief feel that God is their Helper, and that he will save them.

We pray that poverty may be blessed to the poor, and that they may learn to work out of it a grace of God which shall make them fit to be disciples of Christ in the heavenly land.

We beseech of thee that those who are in the midst of worldly trials and perplexities, may be able to carry themselves so that men shall see that God is with them.

We beseech of thee, O Lord our God, that thou wilt open the heart of every one who is in prosperity. Grant that those who are blessed with abundance may not grow selfish. Grant that self-indulgence may not take possession of them. May they not forget the dependence of men upon each other. May pitifulness and charity fill the hearts of all those whom thou art filling with worldly good.

We pray that thou wilt teach our young men to grow up in honor; in truth; in fidelity; in large-mindedness; in the power of doing good; in royal love of other men. And we pray that patriotism may be redeemed from its degrading captivities. Make heroes among men again. May our maidens grow up in all purity and sweetness of love and fidelity. We pray that faithful instruction may be as the gate of heaven to them. May the Lord dwell in the midst of them.

Grant, we pray thee, that the foundation of things may be established in all this land. And yet, why do we pray for it as if it were the only land which thou dost think of. Remember other nations besides our own. Pity all the nations of the earth. Oh, bring in those years of prediction which have been so slowly coming on. How long will thy purposes need to linger? How long before the blessings which thou hast in store for mankind shall ripen?

O Lord our God, lay thine hand upon the tree of life, and shake down the leaves from it for the healing of the nations, that they may learn to cast away their ignorance, their selfishness, their degradation, their false religions; that they may learn to cast away everything that is vile and unmanly; that there may be no more oppressions; that there may be no more wars; that there may be nothing which shall defile in all the world.

And bring men together, at last. In these later ages, teach this quarreling, selfish, hating, fighting race to love, so that ere long, rising in sweet concord, prayers of love and songs of love and joy, shall fill the air, and Heaven hear the music, and the new heaven and the new earth in which dwell righteousness, come. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

And to thy name, Father, Son and Spirit, shall be the praise. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we pray for thy blessing to rest upon the word of truth. Grant that it may be indeed a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path. May we betake ourselves to thy word. It is a guide. How many in this ship have gone safely over the stormy sea! How many have found thy rod and thy staff to be a strength and a comfort! How many have found in communion with thee, and in the interpretation of thy precious truths, life from the dead! O Lord, we pray that we may have the knowledge of God, personal relationship to him, and the sanctifying influences of the divine Spirit. May we be restrained from looking to ourselves and leaning upon ourselves; and, above all, from doing it conceitedly, and with overweening confidence. May we seek to remember, not ourselves alone, but Jesus Christ, the hope of glory. And so living, may we find ourselves under the influence of the life to come, until we shall be permitted to inherit it, and dwell with thee.

And to thy name shall be the praise, forever and ever. *Amen.*

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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